

Heber Valley's First Powwow

by Sonni Schwinn

The powwow being held in Heber City, June 3-5, is not the first powwow to come to town.

The Black Hawks had a powwow here sometime between 1926 and 1930, according to the memories of two Heber residents, Darrell

Prescott and Bill Cliff. Neither could remember very many details about the event, but their recollections are worth repeating.

Mr. Prescott said he was about 11 years old the year of the Black Hawk Days celebration. He said it

was part of the county fair and that Black Hawks "came from all over."

He said they camped and danced on the lawn of the old courthouse and jail and that "there were a lot of people."

"I remember that Indians used to come in from out in the Uintah Basin [to get supplies] and camp in the backyard of our neighbors. That was Tom Jones, Dick Jones' dad."

They ran sheep out in the basin," he said.

The Jones home was in the cen-

ter of Heber City, near Center Street and Second East.

It's been 70 years since the people of the Heber Valley welcomed the Black Hawks for its first powwow. As a community, we wel-

come the Indians of all nations to the second Heber Valley Powwow and hope they will return every year, as it becomes an annual event. Volunteers are needed to help in the powwow activities. There will be a parade and all organizations, businesses, or individuals are invited to participate.

For more information or to volunteer, call Ken Davis, chairman of the powwow committee, 654-2590.

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Several thousand Indians are expected to arrive in Heber for the first Heber City Powwow, June 2-5. The total population of Heber is only about 4,300. To prepare the people in the community for the impact, Indians are explaining Indian culture and the strict powwow etiquette at a series titled, *Introduction to the Heber Valley Powwow*, three mini-powwows.

Those of us who attended the first one, Feb. 17 at the Wasatch High School auditorium, realized early in the evening that, while our cultures are different, we are very much alike.

One of the purposes of the series is to dispel prejudices harbored by many non-Indians. Anyone who expected a "wild Indian" show must have been surprised when it turned out to be, instead, an educational, cultural and spiritual evening. Anyone who feared the June powwow might bring "a bunch of drunken Indians" to town learned that liquor in any form is banned from a powwow and if an Indian consumes liquor he loses the privilege of wearing an eagle feather.

Throughout the evening I was very conscious of being an outsider observing an unfamiliar way of showing gratitude to the Creator, expressing friendship, honoring heroes and demonstrating traditional skills through music and dance. Even when we non-Indians were invited to participate in some of the dances, I felt like an intruder.

But the intent of those presenting the program was to help us get to know them, not emphasize our differences. They already know us because they live and work in a non-Indian society. Their message was clear: We want you to get to know us, too, so we can be friends.

The presentation began with an Indian prayer to the Creator, first offering thanks for all His creations, then requesting His blessings, particularly during the program. It was a prayer any Christian, Jew or Muslim could say "amen" to, uniting rather than separating

the Heber Valley Powwow will set up camps and construct an arena at the county fairgrounds, which a medicine man will bless as construction progresses. Booths will be built for selling food, arts and crafts.

The prayer was followed by the grand entry, when all the participants danced onto the stage, one at a time, while the audience stood. The oldest men and leaders always lead the procession, followed by younger men, women, then children.

Our emcee was Professor Nola Lodge, an Onaida Indian, who teaches Native American studies at the University of Utah. She explained that 25 drum groups and hundreds of dancers may compete in a large powwow, taking an hour or two to fill the arena during the grand entry, a spectacular sight.

Throughout the evening she instructed us on powwow protocol, emphasizing that a powwow is a sacred event. There is always an emcee who tells the audience what to expect and explain what is happening in the arena. The arena director manages the arena and enforces the protocol, ousting a disrespectful spectator, if necessary.

Professor Lodge said spectators must provide their own chairs, although some bleachers will be provided at the fairgrounds. The front rows are reserved for competitors and their families. Some of the dancers, particularly the men, may reverse their chairs and sit backwards to prevent damage to their elaborate costumes.

Dancers and drum groups compete in categories according to age and type of dancing. Traditional dancing is conservative in tempo, movements and costume. Fancy dancing, developed during the past 80 years, is faster, with more intricate footwork and the costumes are more spectacular. There are also inter-tribal dances and some dances which non-Indians may join.

The emcee announces when to stand, as during men's traditional

explained it demonstrated the skills required in hunting or war. The dancers crouched, watching the ground for indications of their prey or enemies and looking around for signs of danger, with grace and rhythm. He said Indians dance with their hearts, minds and souls in tune with the Creator.

Both men and women design and make their own costumes. Every color and ornament has personal meaning. One man said he wasn't wearing full regalia because some of the symbols, handmade with thanks to the Creator, were so personal and sacred that he only wears them to actual powwows and didn't feel he could share them that night.

We learned that the eagle symbolizes nearness to the Creator and that eagle feathers are bestowed as honors, usually on returning warriors. Today those who are veterans in service to the United States receive eagle feathers.

The feathers are religious symbols that bring good luck and well-being, and are used in prayer, to comfort, and heal, similar to anointed oil in some religions. An Indian respects his eagle feather and will lose it if he dishonors it, the greatest insult he can suffer.

Indians no longer kill eagles, not only because it is illegal, but because they are deeply saddened that so few eagles exist anymore. One Indian solemnly asked us to pray for eagles. Those who can document their Indian heritage are given eagle feathers by the federal government, taken from those that are found dead from poison, gunshots, or accidents.

Backstage, before the program, I took a close up look at the costumes and was surprised to see that what they called traditional costumes were adorned with modern fabrics, plastics and metals. I had expected only buckskin and animal claws. One of the men pointed out that no culture is stagnant, including the Indian culture.

Although the basic tenets and symbolism of Indian religion remain constant, the symbols have been modernized. As foreign explorers and traders crossed into Indian territory with new metals and beads, the Indians incorporated them into their designs. Some of the shells, claws and hoofs which rattled on an Indian's legs to ward off evil and invite good, to keep his mind on good things, have been replaced with bells. But he still keeps his mind on good.

Many of the men and women wore leather belts decorated with two-inch gold disks. One of the women explained they were pocket watch cases, adding, "They must have traded a lot of watches."

She wore a small prayer wheel with an eagle plume in her hair, given to Indian girls when they mature enough to know right from wrong and worn all their lives. Hanging from the back of her belt was a sheathed knife and a pouch for whatever tools a woman might need, like for sewing, "so you don't have to keep going back into the teepee to get things you need."

The men wore no paint and said they seldom use it. They explained that the colors, and the way it is applied, symbolize emotions, history, health and status, and particularly signifies a warrior's society, the army in which he serves.

People travel around the world to observe other cultures without learning anything about the unique Indian culture of our own country. Now that culture is coming to Heber City. Students who have studied about Indians in classrooms will be able to experience Indian culture and participate in some of the festivities.

Ken Davis, local powwow coordinator, hopes to be able to offer at least \$10,000 in prize money to draw top dancers and drum groups from Utah and the surrounding states to the June powwow. He reported progress in trying to get a

major company to help sponsor the event. Heber City has contributed \$4,000, and businesses and individuals are also contributing. If the first powwow is successful, it will become an annual event, growing each year with the potential of

drawing Indians and spectators from across the nation.

The next "Introduction to the Heber Powwow" is scheduled at WHS auditorium March 2 at 7 p.m. It will be free and everyone is invited.



David Blackbird, a fancy dancer, was introduced as "One of the most respected grass dancers in the state" at last week's "Introduction to the Heber City Powwow."

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